AR 11857 1/1 [Obermayer Award Nomination for the Arbeitskreis Landsynagoge Roth] circa 2010 Archives

Obermayer Award Nomination for the Arbeitskreis Landsynagoge Roth

Submitted by Herbert L. Roth, Deborah Roth Howe and Leah Roth-Howe

Fragment of restored ceiling from the renovated synagogue in Roth, Germany with new gold stars painted by the descendants of former Jewish residents.

NOMINEES FOR THE
OBERMAYER GERMAN JEWISH HISTORY AWARD 2011

*Nominee(s): Arbeitskreis Landsynagoge Roth

Annegret Wenz; Founder and First Chairperson
Gabriele C. Schmitt; Founder and Current Chairperson

Web site: www.landsynagogue-roth.de

*Address: Gabriele Schmitt: [redacted]
Annegret Wenz: [redacted]

*Contact Information:

Gabriele Schmitt: [redacted]

Annegrete Wenz: [redacted]

*Nominator(s): Herbert L. Roth (Holocaust Survivor), Deborah Roth-Howe (daughter), Leah Roth-Howe (granddaughter)
*Address: [redacted]

*Phone: [redacted]
Email: [redacted]

**Required.*

SUMMARY OF NOMINEE'S ACTIVITIES:

Occupation: The Arbeitskreis Landsynagogue Roth (ALR) is comprised of 40+ citizens of the village of Roth, Germany and its abutting towns. Their occupations include teachers, professors, archivist, Mayor, former Landrat, Headmaster, physicians, minister, head of the Jewish Community of Marburg, housewives, retired persons, etc. All of them volunteer their time and contribute financially to the work of the ALR. They range in age from 35 to 80+ years old.

Activities and/or projects: Since its founding in 1996, the ALR has worked ceaselessly to preserve and remember its former Jewish community. The ALR oversaw the repair and

renovation of the synagogue, which is actively used today as a place of memorialization and education. The ALR sponsors lectures, concerts, educational events for students and adults, maintenance and tours of the Jewish cemetery, and annual memorial events. Highlights from this year alone include (1) installing "Stolpersteine" in the village, (2) preserving and returning a book of recipes to the granddaughter of the Jewish woman to whom it belonged in the 1930s, (3) working collaboratively with the descendants of former Jewish neighbors to add names of those murdered by Nazis to the headstone in the Jewish cemetery, (4) bringing elementary, middle and high school students to the synagogue to learn about Jewish culture and Roth's former Jewish residents, and (5) hosting descendants of the former Jewish community to speak in local schools and at the synagogue.

Publications with (references):

"*A Reason to Remember:* Roth, Germany 1933-1945" is an exhibit that has been on display at the Hatikvah Holocaust Education Center in Springfield, MA since 2004. Soon, it will move to a newly created "Center for Holocaust, Genocide and Memory Studies" at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, under the guidance of Professor James Young. The exhibit documents in great detail the step-by-step process that led to the demise of Roth's Jewish community and the fates of its 5 Jewish families. The exhibit was created by myself and Rabbi Robert Sternberg, based on a display of archival records organized by the ALR.

Co-authored by Annegret Wenz and Gabriele C. Schmitt of the ALR, with Deborah Roth-Howe and Herbert L. Roth:

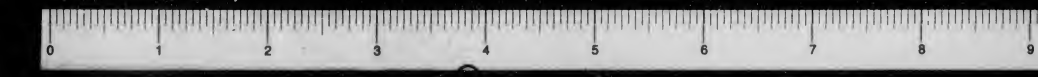
Smith College Studies in Social Work (Vol.77, No.2/3, 2007) *Wrestling with Legacy: An Intergenerational, Cross-Cultural Response to the Holocaust* and

Telling Stories to Change the World, ed. Solinger, Fox and Irani, Routledge Publishing, 1998, *An Unlikely Alliance: Germans and Jews Collaborate to Teach the Lessons of the Holocaust*

In addition, the ALR is currently working with Professor Jonathan Skolnick at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst to publish a bilingual book tracing, in detail, what transpired to Roth's 5 Jewish families between 1933 and 1945. The book will also include essays from descendants of Roth's former Jewish community and from current German citizens of the village.

References to articles about the nominee: Numerous articles highlighting the work of the ALR between 1998 and 2010 have been published in the following German newspapers: Oberhessische Presse, Marburger Neue Zeitung, Lahnblick, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Frankfurter Rundschau, Giessener Allgemeine, Kasseler Sonntagsblatt, etc. Representative articles are included in the enclosed CD.

Additional personal references: Walter Roth (brother of Herbert L. Roth), Chicago, IL;



Michael Wetmore, St. Louis, MO (son of Trude Hochster, a survivor of Roth, Germany); Daniel and Derek Wetmore (grandsons of Trude Hochster)

YOUR REMARKS (please refer to the Call for Nominations for more information; maximum 1,000 words):

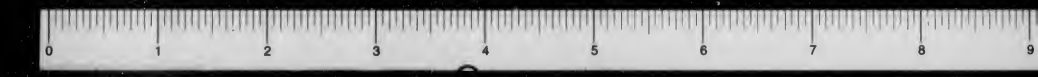
Three generations of a refugee family are submitting this nomination. Herbert Roth fled Roth, Germany as a 14 year old boy in 1938. His was one of 5 Jewish families in this rural village of 500 residents. He, his daughter and granddaughter have returned to the village numerous times to work in partnership with citizens of the village who comprise the Arbeitskreis Landsynagogue Roth (ALR) to build new relationships, preserve the memories of the village's former Jewish community, and to teach the lessons of the Holocaust to American and German students.

My father, Herbert Roth, first met Annegret Wenz, the first Chair of the ALR, in 1987 when he was seeking someone to translate a manuscript he had written documenting the history of Jewish communities of Hessen. Despite the fact that Dr. Wenz was a doctoral student of history and grew up in this small village of 800 people, translating my father's manuscript was her introduction to the former Jewish community of the village in which she lived for 25+ years.

Gabriele Schmitt, teacher and current Chair of the ALR, was also born after WWII. She became interested in Germany's Jewish history when she moved to an abutting village and discovered the dilapidated synagogue in Roth. That was her first exposure to Jewish life in Germany. "How was it possible that nobody at church or in school had ever talked about it. . .not even my parents?" she queried.

Since its founding in 1996, Dr. Wenz, Frau Schmitt and members of the ALR have worked ceaselessly to remember their former Jewish neighbors. They have:

- Renovated the historic synagogue and brought life back to it through their continuous educational programming and cultural events
- Brought more than 2300 students to study at the synagogue over 12 years
- Created/sponsored 14 exhibits documenting Roth's former Jewish community
- Hosted dozens of events (documentaries, music performances, etc.) focusing upon Jewish arts and culture
- Welcomed survivors from the village and their descendants on 11 occasions
- Organized opportunities for Jewish descendants from Roth to speak in local schools
- Created a display documenting the fates of former Jewish residents, and shared those archival documents with my family (these documents became the nucleus of the exhibit "*A Reason to Remember*")



- Translated into German a manuscript written by Herbert Roth, documenting the history of Jews in the district of Hessen, Germany from 1600 to 1942.

- Sponsored 36 lectures related to the former Jewish community of Roth, Jewish culture, Naziism, genocide, etc.

- Furthered their own education pertaining to Jewish history by traveling as a group to Vienna, Worms, Berlin, Frankfurt to study Jewish history

- Designed annual memorial services on Kristallnacht, on January 27th, and occasionally on September 6th and December 8th, the dates Jews from Roth were deported

- Maintained the sanctity of the Jewish cemetery

- Worked collaboratively with survivors from Roth to create a memorial stone, identifying Jews from the village who were murdered by Nazis

- Installed memorial plates on the houses of former Jewish residents

- Had "stolpersteine" placed in front of a formerly Jewish home

- Extensively interviewed survivors from Roth, documenting their stories to share with German students

- Co-authored 2 articles with me (see above)

The above list itemizes the extraordinary, and continuous, events the ALR has dedicated itself to. Please review the enclosed CD to see photos and read newspaper articles describing many of these projects. Many more are described on the ALR website (www.landsynagoge-roth.de). What the above list does not include, that is equally important, is the outreach it has done to welcome its former Jewish residents back and to create genuine, deep-felt relationships and friendships with those Jews who fled and with their descendants. It has been an unexpected and extraordinary experience to return to my father's village of birth and feel safe and welcome. My father, my daughter and I have spoken in the local schools, stayed at the homes of ALR members, and developed a deep and healing connection with one another. The honesty with which members of the ALR own their Holocaust history has allowed me to reclaim my own family history, which is most often lost to children of immigrants. This has also been true for the descendants of Roth's two other Jewish families who fled and who have descendants. It is a gift beyond measure.

Current and Future Projects:

I am currently working with the ALR on 3 new projects.

The first is a student exchange program that would allow a German student from the region to study at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst (under the guidance of Professor Jonathan Skolnick of the German Department) and work as in intern in the newly established Center for Holocaust, Genocide and Memory Studies under the guidance of Professor James Young. A student from UMass would then study at the University of Marburg and intern with the ALR.

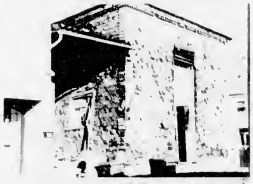
The second project is very exciting and indicative of the reciprocal partnership we have developed. The exhibit "*A Reason to Remember*" exists in both a permanently installed form and also as a traveling exhibit, which has now been seen by more than 30,000 individuals across the U.S. The ALR is currently seeking funding to reproduce it for German audiences. Hopefully, in the near future this exhibit will simultaneously travel throughout Germany. It is has been a collaborative German-Jewish project in every sense of the word.

The third project in process is the creation of a bilingual book that will include the information presented in the exhibit "*A Reason to Remember*" and also essays by the families of those who fled, by members of the ALR, and various Professors.

The fundamental work of the ALR continues: its educational and cultural programming, its outreach to youth, its work to memorialize and remember its former Jewish residents, and its efforts to develop sincere and meaningful relationships with the children and grandchildren of those who fled. The work is ongoing. Therein lies its real value.

Memorial Stone in Roth's Jewish Cemetery, identifying those who were murdered under the Nazi Regime (below).

Interior of renovated synagogue, now an active memorial and educational center (above).



Exterior of synagogue in Roth, Germany before and after renovations (above).

Father Fischer, village Priest, teaches Hebrew to village children as one component of a day long program at the synagogue, teaching German children about Jewish traditions (below and left).

Plaque on the interior of the former home of Jewish residents, with photographs and description of their fates and deportation (left).

All photos from the private collection of Deborah Roth-Howe

End of [Obermayer Award
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Landsynagoge Roth] : /